



## FACT SHEET

# Basic Facts About Low-Income Children

## *Birth to Age 18*

Ayana Douglas-Hall | Michelle Chau

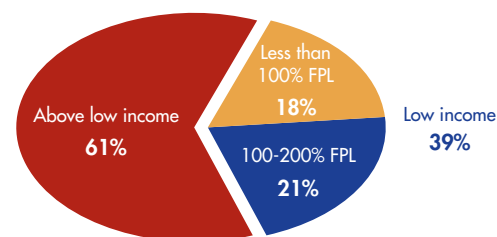
October 2008

### How many children in the United States live in low-income families?

There are over 73 million children in the United States.

- ▶ 39% – 28.8 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 18% – 13.2 million – live in poor families.

Children by family income, 2007



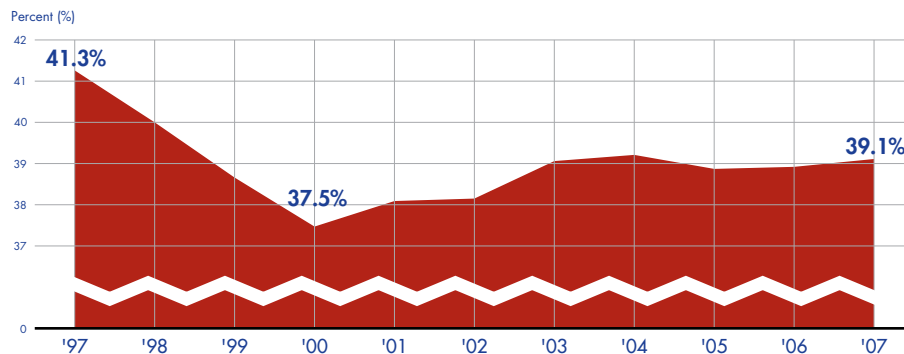
### National Center for Children in Poverty

Mailman School of Public Health  
Columbia University

### Have these numbers changed over time?

After a decade of decline, the proportion of children living in low-income families is rising again, a trend that began in 2000.

Children living in low-income families, 1997-2007



215 W. 125th Street, 3rd Floor  
New York, NY 10027-4426  
Ph. 646-284-9600

[www.nccp.org](http://www.nccp.org)

### What is the federal poverty level (FPL) in 2008?<sup>1</sup>

- ▶ \$21,200 for a family of 4.
- ▶ \$17,600 for a family of 3.
- ▶ \$14,000 for a family of 2.

### Is a poverty-level income enough to support a family?

Research suggests that, on average, families need an income of at least twice the federal poverty level to meet their most basic needs.<sup>2</sup> Families with incomes below this level are referred to as low income:

- ▶ \$42,400 for a family of 4.
- ▶ \$35,200 for a family of 3.
- ▶ \$28,000 for a family of 2.

These figures approximate the average minimum income families need to make ends meet, but actual expenses vary greatly by locality. For a family of 4, the cost of basic family expenses is about \$40,000 per year in rural Chelan County, Washington, \$45,000 in Detroit, and \$51,000 in Houston.<sup>3</sup>

## What are the family characteristics of low-income children?

### Parents' Employment

- ▶ 55% of children in low-income families – 15.7 million – have at least one parent who works full-time, year-round.
- ▶ 26% of children in low-income families – 7.6 million – have at least one parent who works part-time or full-time, part-year.
- ▶ 19% of children in low-income families – 5.5 million – do not have an employed parent.

### Parents' Education

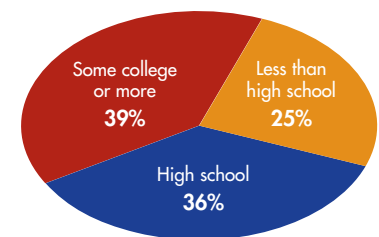
- ▶ 25% of children in low-income families – 7.3 million – live with parents who have less than a high school education.
- ▶ 36% of children in low-income families – 10.4 million – live with parents who have only a high school diploma.

- ▶ 39% of children in low-income families – 11.1 million – live with parents who have some college or more.

### Family Structure

- ▶ 54% of children in low-income families – 15.5 million – live with a single parent.
- ▶ 46% of children in low-income families – 13.3 million – live with married parents.

Children living in low-income families by parent's education level, 2007



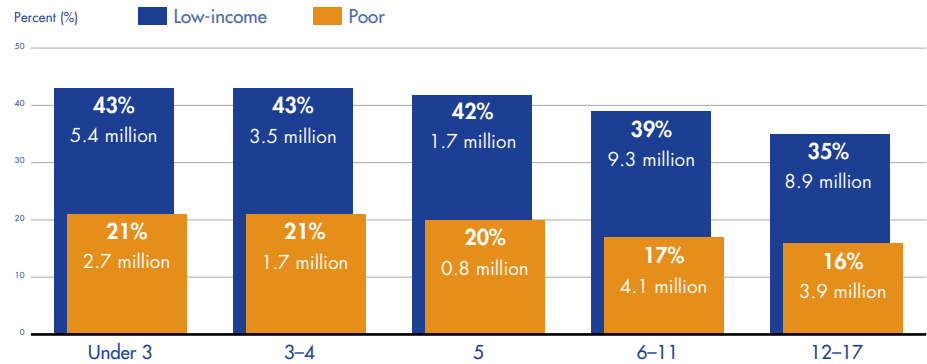
## Does the percent of children in low-income families vary by children's age?

Young children are disproportionately low income. 43% of children under age 6 – more than 10 million – live in low-income families.

- ▶ 43% of children under age 3 years – 5.4 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 43% of children ages 3 and 4 years – 3.5 million – live in low-income families.

- ▶ 42% of children age 5 years – 1.7 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 39% of children ages 6 through 11 years – 9.3 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 35% of children ages 12 through 17 years – 8.9 million – live in low-income families.

Children living in low-income and poor families, by age group, 2007

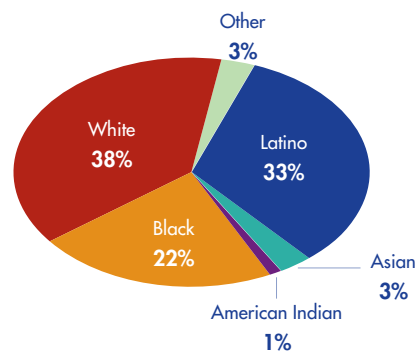


## Does the percent of children in low-income families vary by race/ethnicity?

- ▶ 57% of American Indian children – 0.3 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 61% of Latino children – 9.4 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 60% of black children – 6.5 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 30% of Asian children – 0.9 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 26% of white children – 10.9 million – live in low-income families.

Although American Indian, Latino, and black children are disproportionately low income, whites comprise the largest group of low-income children.

Children living in low-income families, by race/ethnicity, 2007



## Does the percent of children in low-income families vary by parents' country of birth?<sup>24</sup>

- ▶ 58% of children of immigrant parents – 7.4 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 35% of children of native-born parents – 20.2 million – live in low-income families.

## Does the percent of children in low-income families vary by where children live?

### Region

- ▶ 43% of children in the South – 11.7 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 39% of children in the West – 7.0 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 35% of children in the Northeast – 4.3 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 36% of children in the Midwest – 5.8 million – live in low-income families.

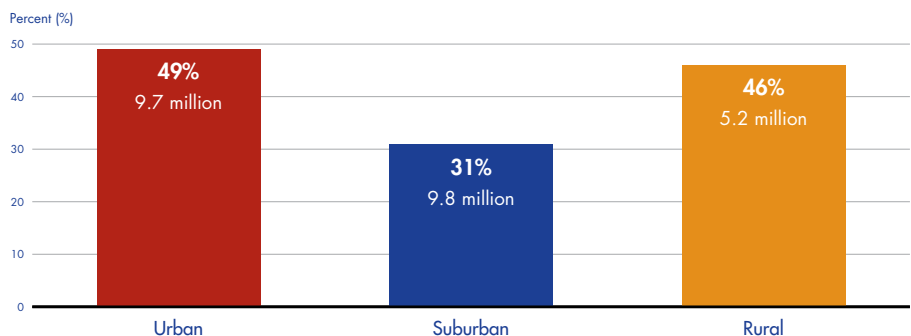
### Type of Area

- ▶ 49% of children in urban areas – 9.7 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 31% of children in suburban areas – 9.8 million – live in low-income families.
- ▶ 46% of children in rural areas – 5.2 million – live in low-income families.

### Residential Instability

- ▶ 18% of children in low-income families – 5.1 million – moved in the last year.
- ▶ 8% of children in above low-income families – 3.5 million – moved last year.

Children living in low-income families, in urban, suburban, and rural areas, 2007



## Endnotes

*Unless otherwise noted, data estimates were prepared by Ayana Douglas-Hall and Michelle Chau of NCCP based on the U.S. Current Population Survey, Annual Social and Economic Supplement, March 2008, representing information for calendar year 2007. Estimates include children living in households with at least one parent and most children living apart from both parents (for example, children being raised by grandparents). Among children who do not live with at least one parent, parental characteristics are those of the householder and/or the householder's spouse.*

1. These numbers are from the federal poverty guidelines issued annually by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. The demographic findings in this fact sheet were calculated using more complex versions of the federal poverty measure – the thresholds

issued by the U.S. Census Bureau.

For more information on measuring poverty, see NCCP's state profiles and the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services <[aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/08poverty.shtml](http://aspe.hhs.gov/poverty/08poverty.shtml)>.

2. Cauthen, Nancy K.; Fass, Sarah. 2008. *Measuring Income and Poverty in the United States*. New York, NY: National Center for Children in Poverty, Columbia University, Mailman School of Public Health.

3. NCCP's Basic Needs Budget Calculator <[www.nccp.org/tools/budget](http://www.nccp.org/tools/budget)>.

4. Approximately 1.1 million low-income children, ages birth to 18, live in households with one immigrant parent and one native-born parent. Those children are not counted in this figure.